

**Interviewee:** Roger Alvarado

**Interviewers:** Dr. Grace Yoo, Dr. Mark Allan Davis, Sydney Jackson

**Video recorder:** Yoko Tamada

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**Transcriber:** Hal Saga

**Bio:** Roger Alvarado was born in San Francisco and settled with his family in Pacifica, graduating from Westmoor High School in Daly City in 1961. Alvarado entered San Francisco State College that same year, getting involved with the tutorial program in efforts to support underserved high school communities. Alvarado was a part of the Latin American Student Association at San Francisco State and represented the TWLF as a spokesperson.

**Abstract:** 00:01:13-00:12:16 Alvarado speaks about his experience growing up in the Bay Area – in particular, him working in the tutorial program at San Francisco State. 00:12:17-00:50:29 He then begins to elaborate on how he perceived the beginnings of the strike from the perspective of being in the Latin American Student Association and as a spokesperson of the Third World Liberation Strike. 00:50:30-01:03:06 Alvarado continues the interview with talking about his identity, Black consciousness, and his 21 days in jail. 01:06:09-01:17:21 Alvarado touches on what solidarity looks like to him by discussing tactics of organizing people to join movements. 01:23:16-01:24:56 He speaks fondly of fellow LASA member Juan Preferria who encouraged him in learning critical organizing information he carried into his day-to-day life.

## Transcript

[...]

00:01:03 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** Thank you so much, Roger, for coming to interview with us today. We're excited to have you.

00:01:08 **Roger Alvarado:** Thank you for the invitation.

00:01:13 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** Where did you grow up?

00:01:15 **Roger Alvarado:** I was born in San Francisco, and we moved around a lot. By the time I went to the fifth grade, I'd been to six different schools. Fortunately, we settled down at that point, so I spent the rest of my youth in Pacifica. We got into the first housing unit that was built in the south end of what is Pacifica. We stayed there from '54 on.

00:01:52 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** Did you stay? How did you get to San Francisco State?

00:01:57 **Roger Alvarado:** Y'know, I had some friends when I was in high school and we actually came out of sixth and seventh grades together, and they went into the university track, right. And so, I followed along with them, and when I came out of high school, I found out I was eligible to come to SF State. My sister had come to SF State for a couple of years. She was a year older than I, and so, I came into the school to see what was going on.

00:02:22 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** What high school and what year was that?

00:02:25 **Roger Alvarado:** This is Westmoor High School. I graduated in '61.

00:02:32 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** So in 1961, you entered San Francisco State.

00:02:37 **Roger Alvarado:** The Fall of '61.

00:02:40 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** Could you tell us what you got involved with here at San Francisco State?

00:02:46 **Roger Alvarado:** The first couple of years, I was pretty much undereducated. Not exposed to too much. It's kind of a curious family situation – my father was from El Salvador, my mother was Irish and English. My dad did not speak Spanish in the house. It wasn't until years later that I realized that he really had trouble with his origins. That was sort of the family dynamic that was happening. At the same time, just as I'm coming out of high school, my

parents broke up, and that was a pretty contentious issue for a while. So, the first couple years that I was here, I was pretty much just dealing with that, and putting my time in.

00:03:33 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** What was your major when you were here?

00:03:35 **Roger Alvarado:** I was thinking about going into elementary education, and the advice I got was incredibly...nothing. I mean, I went to see this guy, and the way he talked to me was like, "You're not going anywhere. You're not doing anything, so I'm not going to take my time with you." Right? And I walked out of there. I knew less than what I knew when I went in, you know? That was the last time I ever went to any kind of advising. I initially came in for elementary ed, and then I got into majoring in introductory courses. I think I took every introductory course during the time I was there.

00:04:16 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** What year in school did you start to get involved with different things, and what were the things you got involved with?

00:04:21 **Roger Alvarado:** I got involved with the SF State Student Tutorial Program, and I wound up working with a young girl – Marilyn – and she was in Chinatown. At the time, I was working in the small lumber yard down in Pacifica. I was working Tuesdays and Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays. So when I came in – I think my time was like, Tuesday and Thursday – to spend time with Marilyn. It turns out that Marilyn's father was actually a friend of Doug Sorenson. Doug was the one running the S.F. State Student Community Involvement Program in an office next to the Tutorial Program. He and I kind of established our relationship during that time. The following year, the tutorial program announced that they were going to start working with some high school students at Jefferson High School in Daly City, with the selection of the High School students having to do with them being "underachievers." What wound up happening is that I went in and talked to the crew that was running the tutorial program at the time and told them I had a car, and I was interested in working with these high school students. It turns out the five students were all young women. They're all juniors in high school. They were all grading out as below their supposed abilities. And so, what we did for that year, I would pick them up in Daly City and take them into the Fillmore. They would work with elementary school kids for a couple of hours, and then I would take them back to their homes. I'd drop them off at their homes on the way back, and we did that for a year, and it began to grow. We no longer had a stipulation about having somebody be an underachiever or whatever. People who wanted to come out of high school and do this work could do that. And so, the group expanded, right? I mean, we involved probably anywhere between 25 to 30 high school students by that point. And Guy Sandler, who was then the coordinator of the tutorial program, came to me and said, "Well, what about putting together some kind of proposal for special admissions, right?" It turns out that the president of the college has the option to allow a minimal percentage of students on an exceptional basis. We wrote together a proposal and got a tremendous amount of support from

the Dean of Students, Dr. F. Raddell, he set up meetings for us after we had written the proposal that we would attend with various people in staff to talk about how this would run, right?

Unfortunately, we were also involved with one of the professors of the psychology department who turned out to be less than trustworthy. I say that because once the proposal was accepted and 25 students were admitted under this particular condition, I walked into the room in which they were having one of their classes and realized that they were in a room with a one-way mirror. I started with that – my objection with that, right? As far as the students were concerned, and that this was something that they didn't have to tolerate, and any time they wanted to, they could get up and leave. At that point, I had decided to withdraw from the High School Project, and I was offered the coordination of the entire Tutorial Program, which I accepted. We went on to continue to grow the program to the point where we had 28 centers and locations, whether in schools, community rooms or housing projects. And we had about 400 plus college students who were mentoring their kids twice a week for the whole time of the semester. About that time is when you began to hear the, well, to get into where we were at that point, in what was happening. There was a whole struggle with McCarthyism and the apartheid in South Africa that was established in the '50s. There was the war in Indo-China that became the Vietnam War coming forward. There was the emergence of Malcolm X, and some of the work that he was doing...as well as the assassinations. Y'know, the assassination of the president, assassination of Malcolm, the assassination of Bobby Kennedy, and then the assassination of Martin Luther King, right? And unfortunately, at the time, and I think this is one of the feelings that we had is that we did identify the murdering of the Civil Rights workers assassinations as a part of the political agenda of discriminatory practices. It just was, y'know, systematically maintained within the whole social structure, because it was real and it would have solidified, right? The commonality within all of these concerns generated the direction for actions to be taken because the issues were just so extreme.

So when Black Consciousness comes onto the campus right, Jimmy Garrett comes – I believe he came out of SNCC – from the South, to L.A., and then the Bay Area. I believe he was working with a couple of faculty people that – I would leave it to Jimmy to say who they were – who were instrumental, I think, in terms of assisting in how to go about working on putting together the presentation of Black Studies to the campus, right? At the same time, within the tutorial program which was made up of mostly liberal white students, not only in terms of the tutors, but also in terms of the staff, because we had a staff of over 20 people in order to run this program. There was a lot of tension in regards to how this was coming across. There was a sense of rejection that this group felt by this particular approach. We went into the Spring with this issue coming to the floor. We had a summer program that was going to happen here on campus, where we would bring the kids to the campus and then put in the various programs with them. It was during this time that it was almost daily, after the kids were taken back to their place, homes by bus, that we sat down and began to go through these dialogues, arguments, discussions about, y'know, what was going to happen with the tutorial program. If we were solidified in supporting the Black movement, it meant that the internal structure and participation of the program had to

essentially change. We got to the end of the summer, when the decision was made that that's the direction we were going to take. What happened at that point is that a significant number of the people left. At this time, because the program was being turned over to three coordinators, George Murray, Tom Williams, and Bob Weaver. George and Thomas are Black. Bob is white. These three that were going to be in charge of handling the program. I left the program at that point and became involved with Connell Persico and Bill Belmont. The three of us sat down and looked at the possibility of putting together something like that, the Antioch project, a field work and college related study curriculum toward a bachelor's degree, which we did, and we presented it to the Dean of Academic Affairs Dr. Garity, at the time. He laughed us out of the room. But, however, we were still able to secure the participation of the faculty members on campus. Sharon Gold, who is now Sharon Martinez, was really a tremendous help to us, right? At this point, I want to acknowledge the role that women had in regards to what was going on, because so much of the work that got done was by the women in terms of connections, follow-up, y'know, really the groundwork of what it took to run so much of what we were doing. So that's where we were, right? We got together with the Experimental College, the work study program, the BSU and a film project run by Oscar...who was a Black film director-producer in the Black Student Union. We put together a proposal to Carnegie. Carnegie came out, invited some of us back to New York for review of the proposal, and they awarded us a \$50,000 grant for that summer. About that time, I began working more intensively in the Mission District.

00:14:00 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** What year was that, by the way?

00:14:02 **Roger Alvarado:** This is like, I wanna say, '65, '66, somewhere in there. I was spending less time on the campus so that by the time we come to the Spring of '68, I'm not on campus. There are demonstrations that are happening because the students wanted to make sure that the EOP Program continues, as well as ethnic studies and/or Black Studies and other studies are able to be funded. One of the things that's happening during this whole time is that the BSU has continued to move through the campus hierarchy to validate the necessity for Black Studies, to the point where not only deans of schools, y'know, look forward to having that program initiated, but also the academic senate accepts the foundation of a necessity for Black Studies and the president of the college at the time, Summerskill, had moved in that same direction. Right about this time, there's an incident that happens with The Gator, which is the student-run newspaper, right? The Gator had, for at least that particular school year, which would include the Fall semester of '67, '68, run a really racist, slanted criticism of the BSU – the whole notion of Black, what Black means, the identity of Black. They ran some really racist political cartoons – of which you can't find any now. I mean, people have looked, right?

00:15:55 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** They can't find this edition of The Gator.

00:15:59 **Roger Alvarado:** Mary Anna Wadi, who was then the head of the Afro-American Students Association, and also Jimmy Garrett, I think, was in one of the cartoons. But as far as history is concerned—

00:16:13 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** You can't find it.

00:16:14 **Roger Alvarado:** It's like it never happened, right? And so, I come back to the campus at that time, and when the confrontation occurs between some of the members of the Black Student Union and The Gator staff, there's a fistfight that breaks out in The Gator office, and a typewriter gets thrown out of the window. At this point, it all becomes incredibly politicized, right? The incident is made to seem as though it's a minor riot that's happened. It's all the Black students' fault, there's no basis for any of the criticisms that's been made. And George Murray becomes the focus. George had just become the Minister of Education for the Black Panther Party, but he's also been hired by Robert Taylor in the English department to teach English composition, right? To people who were struggling in terms of learning how to write and whatever. The California State College System Chancellor down in Long Beach began to get involved in insisting that something be done about George. The message goes out: "Fire George." No, Bob won't do it, and the Dean of his department won't do it. The Dean of the school won't do it. Summerskill won't do it. We get to November 6th, and I've come back to the campus that Fall and joined the Latin American Student Organization, and petitioned to become a part of the TWLF, which at the time, I think was the Chinese-Japanese-Black Student Union-Philipino Students, PACE and the Mexican-American Student Association – I believe LASA petitioned to be admitted and was brought into the TWLF.

Our group, LASA, I don't think, numbered more than ten people. Not that we were the only Latin Americans that were on the campus, but in terms of being political and so forth. In our group, we had an Argentinian by the name of Juan Preferria who had a tremendous amount of perspective and political awareness, as well as a real historian of Latin American-U.S. relations, right? We joined the TWLF in September or October, and we were all waiting to see what was going to happen with Black Studies. They finally come back and acknowledge – the school – finally comes back and acknowledges that there is no money. So in spite of all the acceptances and approvals, and y'know, doing the procedural work in order to have Black Studies recognized, they're just completely thrown out the window. The BSU called for the strike on November 6th. The other organizations in the TWLF met for those two days, November 6th and 7th, and then on the 8th. Wednesday, we came back and said, we not only support the demands, but have five of our own. One of which was the call for the School of Ethnic Studies.

We'd seen what had happened in other institutions where different programs were put under different departments or different schools. You had to struggle in this isolated realm of participation with no support and no backing, right? The school was essential. Without the school, we were going to end up like everybody else, and it's just going to be the same thing all over again, right? I had been in the University of California, and seeing some of their material, I

walked into this room – which is about the size of this one – and it was wall-to-wall books, a room full of theses written for Master and PhD degrees, that people had written under Black Studies on that campus. It was like, why is it just in this room? It was incredulous to me that you had all of this work that had been done, and it was going nowhere. And you would agree, you walk out the door and that's all you got, right? So we joined the strike. At that point, I think one of the things that Malcolm talked about in a speech that he made is, you really saw it come to the surface in regards to the level of participation that occurred. What I'm referring to is when he talked about the lack of self-determination, and he was talking to a group of young Black people. His perspective applied to everybody, because everybody was not experiencing the same level of racism as Black people, but they were experiencing the whole lack of any self-determination that they were unable to express in any way shape or form. I think on this campus it became really clear, because that time, we had at least six student-run programs that are all directed by students, funded by students, and dealt with a number of instances – student needs, right? The Experimental College was one example of it. The faculty evaluation – the first faculty evaluation by students was organized and on the campus. It had been in existence for three or four years. I think there was a sense of being able to exercise some sense of your own determination as to where you were going, and what you were going to do, that as the weeks of the strike initiated and went on to about the second week or so, you began to see more and more people participating. One of the things that made a big difference is that it was a small group that came out of the Black Student Union and got into classrooms, started talking to the classrooms. Some of the faculty began to recognize that there may need to participate beyond being just verbally supported, which turned out to be huge in regards to not only a part I've been able to hold on, but also to, for some of us, just our physical well-being, right? By this time, Summerskill, the College's president, when all of this starts, refuses to fire George Murray, who is the focus and this is the focus in not only the chancellor's office, not only the governor and the mayor, but also the media. I mean, they're all over George, right? George is responsible for everything. Summerskill refuses to fire George. Summerskill is gone, fired by the Chancellor, and they bring in Bob Smith, who came out of the School of Education and had a lot of support among the faculty and the same pressures are put on Bob. I think Bob was the one who requested that we have a convocation, and this is like, the second or third week of the strike, right? Because the tensions have gone beyond excessive on the campus. One of the things that's happened by the end of the first week is that more and more police start winding up on the campus. At the time, we had a large cafeteria, which consisted of a faculty dining room – a large room for just cafeteria food. There was a small room for the sororities and fraternities called The Redwood Room, and then there was a little bit, y'know, nicer, modern cafe, coffee shop, on the backside. The police were coming into the large room and started hassling the various students to the point of which, y'know, people were running around, trying to get out of the cafeteria. At one point, the police wanted to go back into the kitchen. The kitchen, the workers, I mean, they're standing there, and said to the police, "You don't belong here, and there's nobody here that you're

interested in, so you can leave.” That goes on, and it intensifies. There’s a couple of incidents where people are pretty badly beaten by the tactical squad.

Smith steps up and says, “Okay, before this thing continues to get more out of hand can we have a convocation?” We said, “Alright.” We sat down and went through it – this internal discussion – within the TWLF about whether or not we would participate. Some people said, “No, it’s a complete capitulation. You don’t want to do that. You don’t want to be seen as...compromising yourself.” The other side said, “This is an opportunity to get our voices heard and people without having to go individually into classrooms and stuff.” So we had the convocation.

The Convocation goes on for two days. There’s a few people from the administration, there’s a few people from the Black Student Union, TWLF, they’re each relaying back and forth about their particular positions. It’s becoming clearer and clearer that the issue isn’t on campus – the issue is with Long Beach, the Chancellor’s office and the issue is with the governor’s office, right? So it’s like there was an agreement that we put forth in terms of participating in the convocation. We said we would be a part of the convocation as long as there were no disciplinary actions taken against anybody who had participated in the strike up until that point. On the second day, I’m coming back into the convocation and somebody stops me and says, “Look at these two notices.” I look at them, and they’re disciplinary actions against two people who have been arrested or charged with something, right? So I went up to the podium and said, “The convocation is over.” We walked out of that room, and 90% of the people that were in the auditorium got on the picket line. It just swelled from there.

The faculty that was supporting us got together and applied to be recognized as a union. We were coming down – I think it was sometime in December – and the tactical squad, which, at that time, was like the SWAT Team. They had been trained by dealing with anti-war demonstrations, so they had gotten a lot of practice in being able to agitate and get people to react to them. Where we were at is that we were coming out of the quad alongside what is the student center now. The tactical squad was coming up outside of this building – the psychology building – up the path to confront one another. We were probably 20 yards away from each other, and the faculty came walking through with their strike signs. They had just gotten recognized by the S.F. Labor Council – that the faculty had formed a legitimate union – and so what happened is that they froze the police. They weren’t about to start taking on the union, especially with the relationship that the city has had with the police and the unions.

00:27:56 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** What day was that? Is there a date for that?

00:27:58 **Roger Alvarado:** Historically, I don’t–

00:27:59 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** Or a month, maybe? What month was that?

00:28:02 **Roger Alvarado:** I want to say December, because it was at that point, things had gotten pretty, really intense – really, really intense. There were confrontations that

happened...people were attacked, and one guy lost his spleen simply walking out of the library. There was a time when we used to have these huts, these little, "so called" temporary buildings and that's where all the programs were at. There was one long hut, and there was a series of three smaller huts that were perpendicular to the corridor that went in between. I kept walking out of the hut, and this one cop had gotten separated from his platoon or whatever. He's walking backwards. As I looked down this corridor, he's got his gun out, and he's scared. He waved the gun around, and I was like, "Okay, just get everybody back. Let this guy get back to where he's going and just get him out of here." It was that kind of intensity.

We go into December – we have the support of the union, which means that we now can picket out on the street and not get hassled and whatever. We do, every once in a while, march in the quad as a demonstration of solidarity and the commitment of the people. This is to be acknowledged over and over again. The commitment of the people who are participating, on any and every level, was incredible. People came back the day after they'd been beaten up, knocked down, got bandages around their head. Hayakawa gets named as the president after Bob Smith is fired.

00:29:53 **Dr. Mark Allan Davis:** Bob Smith was fired, as well?

00:29:56 **Roger Alvarado:** Yes, he was.

00:29:57 **Dr. Mark Allan Davis:** Because he wasn't compliant.

00:29:58 **Roger Alvarado:** He wasn't compliant. He wasn't compliant. Some of this, some of what I'm relating comes out later on, but I would include it here because this was the time period in which it happened. What was going on was that Reagan wanted to come in with the National Guard as he had done over at the University of California at Berkeley, and Alioto, a Democrat, who was then the mayor and had aspirations to become the governor. The last thing that was going to happen is that he'd allowed a Republican governor to bring the National Guard onto a campus within his city. There was that standoff, right, which in some perspective, you can say would work to our advantage, or at least assisted us in that sense.

00:30:47 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** I had no idea that the National Guard was going to be called. That's...wow.

00:30:51 **Roger Alvarado:** That was his push. That was Reagan's solution. They were going to drop gas out of helicopters like they did in Berkeley. All the rest of that. The other thing is it was that other municipalities from, as far away as out of state, were bringing in their police force to get trained in dealing with so-called "agitators". Beyond curiosity, the reality of this was the way in which we were depicted, right? We are the radicals, we are the communists, we are the socialists, we're all the evil in the world, y'know? A lot of us are white, a lot of us aren't. People

from the community come out, Ron Delloms, I think Willie Brown, Cecil Williams, Carlton Goodman, the manager, the publisher of The Black Newspaper and Community People – they come out to the campus and they speak, and it really does represent a relationship between the campus and the communities that we came from, up until then, we're just essentially non-existent. We go on like this and Hayakawa has gotten himself appointed the College President and he says, "Okay, we're going to cut this semester. We're going to increase Christmas vacation by a week." So we're going to be out of school a week earlier, right? Instead of two weeks off, we have three weeks off.

The question is what's going to happen?

People head off and deal with Christmas and then New Year's, and then we come back to campus and we're back on it again. The teachers are still on strike. We're still on strike, and we're going on from there. There is sometime in this period where we hold a rally and we were at the speaker's platform, which was between the cafeteria and the gym, and it was put there after the Free Speech Movement in Berkeley, because the campus, at that time, didn't want to get involved in any conflict regarding it, so they put a platform up so anybody can say whatever they want to, because this is free speech, right? We had a rally there, and it was at that time that the major bust happened and the 400 plus people got arrested. Once we were by the policemen, they all surrounded everybody, and—

00:33:23 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** That was January.

00:33:23 **Roger Alvarado:** We continue through this way. The union – the teachers union – gets a contract. We lose that part of the support. However, we were able to continue on into March, and it's like the dark days of winter. The support is there, but the numbers are dwindling.

00:33:57 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** It was winter, too, right? You all are on the picket line, I heard like, from 7 am to 10 pm every day in front of 19th Avenue.

00:34:04 **Roger Alvarado:** I don't know if we were there that late. It was five days a week the whole time, any time school was in. Unfortunately, confrontations happened earlier, some with...I don't know what the source of it was, but some of the athletes went after – or tried to – oppose the picket lines, and there was that confrontation. There was another time when a number of us were surrounded by the highway patrol. We were caught between two buildings on one pathway, but fortunately, we were close enough to 19th Avenue that the people who were picketing came down that one segment of the two police squadrons got surrounded. The decision for them was whether to let the other police squad come up and beat the hell out of whoever they wanted, but who knows what's going to happen to the surrounded officers, who are now in the middle. The wise decision was made and the squad dispersed. We were then able to move onto the street again. I would come onto the campus after that with two or three people just to see what was going on. By that point, the police up on the roof were hollering, "Let's get this done.

Let's get this going. We want to go home." That's four months into it. The Black Student Union comes to the TWLF and says that Frank Bran, a San Francisco attorney, had been approached by, I believe it must have been the chancellor's office – I'm not sure of this, but somebody from there – about making arrangements to settle. The discussion goes down. We agreed to do this. I believe there were six faculty people. If my understanding is correct, somebody would have to check this to verify it. Hayakawa was taken off the campus, either by some official responsibility or whatever. He had to go do something somewhere, whatever. We met with the rep with faculty from San Francisco State representing the chancellor's office and six of us from the Black Student Union and TWLF. We met at Frank's house for three nights in a row. On the third night, I thought we had gotten to a point of resolution. So we went, we returned back to our groups, came back with the decision that this is the way we would go, and were able to terminate the strike on the 15th of March.

[...]

00:37:34 **Dr. Mark Allan Davis:** I had a question about the money – the funding – earlier on...but I'm just wondering about the funding that the tutorial program and the community involvement. All those things were under ASA, right? When they told the BSU, when everything was moving forward, and they said they had no money, they just suddenly dropped everything. They said, "We have no money." How did that land with you all? Everything was building up so positively and then all of a sudden, it's like, we don't have any money. And then there was the incident with how, well, how do you think the funds were handled?

00:38:25 **Roger Alvarado:** Well, the funds were handled – if I'm not mistaken – there was an administrator, and I can't remember...I think his name was Harry, and he was more like an informer for the administration. I believe it's like the San Francisco Foundation or something like that, some structure like that was the one that dispensed the money. The control of the money was supposedly in the hands of the Associated Students and the executive group. They were the ones who, in '60 or '61, got together and decided that these programs would be instituted and they would be funded with student money. The Black Studies work that was done prior to the strike – some of it was presented to the Experimental College, and so that validated the studies. Once the administration made the decision that we were no longer going to be financed or no longer able to finance ourselves by freezing the money, which is what they could do. You had no recourse, right? There was no money. I'm really glad you brought that point up, because regarding funds and getting people out of jail, the support we got was really incredible. People were not only donating money, they were donating their property. In some instances, people donated property twice. Again, going back to the defense committee, which was put up to handle the whole thing of getting people out of jail, was essentially run by women. It started out with Tomasita and Sharon Martinez, and then went onto...I can't remember Julia's last name, but there were like three or four women that were involved in it, along with Roy Harrison that made

really made it possible to maintain a picket line and maintain a presence on the campus during the whole struggle.

00:40:45 **Dr. Mark Allan Davis:** Do you feel that the tutorial program and all that work that you were doing, that sort of one-on-one with students, and it kind of grew, and taking them home, and interacting with them and really helping them – do you think that played a role, in terms of, from its very beginnings, building up these relationships, these really grassroots, interpersonal relationships, interacting with not only the students, but their families and then their families – those other families – that it grew to lead this sort of base of growth. I'm understanding that the tutorial program really grew a lot while you were working with it, and it grew exponentially, really quickly. I'm just wondering how you feel about those components, the grassroots components of it?

00:41:34 **Roger Alvarado:** I agree with you in the sense that I think that the exchange had an impact. I would hesitate to try to determine to what extent, because it's one of those things that once you have a relationship, right, with a youngster, and once that relationship is broken, going back and trying to regenerate it is, especially in these instances, extremely difficult. There's a loss of confidence, a loss of faith, a loss of trust. It is a benefit to everybody. It's not realized at the time. I used to stand outside of the gym as students were coming in after registration to begin and just hand out flyers and leaflets to talk to people about the possibility of doing that. I think there might have been something in that that carried over to people realizing the bigger world. Many of them, I don't think had ever been in a poor community, or had any sense of whatever poverty there was in the area – which was remarkable for San Francisco – to have the reputation that it has a liberal town, liberal city and for it to pass so ingrained with the racism and the poverty rate, the level of poverty that the city has endured and endures.

00:43:11 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** You're a leader during the strike. Can you talk about – because you were talking about how you joined law – and really, throughout this, you become a leader. Could you talk about that, how that happened for you, and what that was like?

00:43:28 **Roger Alvarado:** LASA joins the TWLF, and we go into a meeting with the TWLF, and it's just certain positions are filled, right? The chair is Al Wong. I believe Crutchfield is a treasurer. Tomasita becomes the secretary. Ron Quidachay was a spokesperson, and I was a spokesperson, as well. There was some angst among part of the TWLF group as to my participation, and that was because I had spent a lot of time on the campus working in various programs and established relationships with faculty – administrators, deans...I had worked for the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Dr. Jack Sheedy, for putting together the work-study program. In fact, he hired me for a year to do this work, and that's where the angst came from. There was a lack of trust. There was that veneer that was in this. When we got going into the strike, there was a challenge made as to my having this position. We were able to hold

our own and retain the position, and we went into the strike. What was remarkable about that experience was the commitment and the consistency. There were only a couple of instances when a particular motion was made that would have negated what we were doing or trying to continue to achieve. The overwhelming response was that we were in this for the long run. We all know what we were struggling to overcome and to address, and that held the day continuously. It's hard to explain. I think of myself basically as an introvert...

00:45:58 **Dr. Mark Allan Davis:** You were there all the time. You went through many years. You were always there.

00:46:02 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** And you're kind of pushed to be the spokesperson in a way, right? We see you on camera. You're there in the KTVU next to Penny!

[...]

00:46:14 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** Were you an older student? How old were you when the strike happened? What was your age?

00:46:22 **Roger Alvarado:** I was like 23.

00:46:24 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** You were 23. Wow.

00:46:26 **Roger Alvarado:** And actually, the leadership of most of the programs, or most of the TWLF, BSU, were older, right?

00:46:37 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** People were vets and then came back to school.

00:46:44 **Roger Alvarado:** I think that made a difference. It really did. As well as the relationship with some of the faculty and the administrators, y'know. In the long run, and that's another part of the story that you need to have Dan Gonzalez to tell, because you flash forward: we go through the strike, we settle the strike. Then the chancellor's office comes back and says, "Okay, you have until this date in August to organize your curriculum. Make sure that you are going to comply, and you're good to go." Well, the only ones that had a curriculum together of any sort was the Black Student Union, so this means the other groups...and it's like, what's his name?

00:47:38 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** Hirabayashi.

00:47:40 **Roger Alvarado:** He was working with the students on that, and some other ones where I'm sure Dr. Juan Martinez was involved in that. But again, go back to people's capacities

and what they're really capable of. Grad students! Right? Grad students are the ones who really, essentially not only do the grunt work, but put the whole thing together. And then, again the duplicity of the system...this is where it comes to fore. There's a specific date when all this stuff is supposed to be provided as stipulated by the chancellor's. They come back a couple of weeks before that date and say, "The date has been moved up a week." Y'know, you're not only putting this together, you're taking care of yourself, you're doing jobs, this and that, whatever. In the middle of finally getting to the point or the pinnacle of where you're at, they come and cut your legs off. Having confidence in the system is a challenge to say the least.

00:48:48 **Dr. Mark Allan Davis:** That hasn't changed.

00:48:52 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** What do you feel like is the lasting impact of the strike on you?

00:48:58 **Roger Alvarado:** There's all kinds of things that I look back on, that I realized, and one of them was that I know a lot less than I think I do. The necessity to be critical, to ask questions, and the importance of appreciating the reality of things...to not take your notions as verbatim and to be willing to, to appreciate not only where you're strong, but also where you're weak...where you know you don't have enough to really decide. The other thing was understanding the extent to which a very few people have such a tremendous amount of influence and outreach to see the way in which the media can be orchestrated. I think, well, not only the experience of the pandemic, but also of Donald Trump, reminds me of that period, and the angst that it generates, and the abuse, and the license to act on the basis of your prejudice and supposed dominance. All of those things come together in appreciating this experience.

00:50:33 **Dr. Mark Allan Davis:** There's one thing that you mentioned earlier on, and I've heard this also from Dr. Garrett as well. You said it earlier, but I think it's really important that you talked about consciousness raising, that there was underlying passion and drive to raise consciousness. That's kind of what I mean when I was talking about engaging with the students in the tutorial program, like, personally engaging. People learn to trust and also to learn to listen when somebody's there for them. I'm just wondering if you could reflect on that – do you feel that that was successful? How that drives to raise consciousness, to raise a consciousness about how we're educated, or how we can be educated, what we need in our education, what we want to really transform it. How do you think that developed? How did you witness it, and do you think it exists?

00:51:33 **Roger Alvarado:** Consciousness has a lot to do with what you're exposed to, right? And exposure comes from something you can't get away from. You're into the reality of whatever that is, and that reality is undeniable. You can make an attempt to deny it, but in making that attempt, you're going to compromise yourself to a point that even you won't be able to tolerate. It's a progression, a realization, but also in terms of participation, the participation

allows you to become more honest with yourself and to understand others in regards to their orientation.

For myself, listening to the logic, the argument, the position of Black consciousness...I go back to an image I saw of one of the Civil Rights demonstrations in the South, and it really struck me. This Black man is carrying a sign that says, "I am a man." I was thinking to myself, "Why would you need to carry that sign?" You go from there, and you learn a lot about the world. The other thing for myself was that I realized my own heritage and what that was about, and the need to appreciate it in terms of having an identity. Realizing that we're not coming out of vacuums, and that an awful lot has happened in order for us to be where we are, and the only way it's going anywhere is if we jump in and participate in it. It's about choosing your spots. Not everybody is going to do the same thing, and you don't need everybody to do the same thing. You really need people to jump in and participate...contribute. People like to say in arguments, "Well, I'm not playing the devil's advocate." You don't need to play the devil, there are enough devils out there y'know? If you're doing something, you're going to uncover all the devils you never wanted to deal with. That's where you go, and that's what spoke to me about Black consciousness...the struggle my father had to deal with his entire life. This comes from his mom. My grandmother was a native of Central America. She was 100% Central American. She was 100% Central American Indian. She was barely five feet tall...I don't think ever weighed 105 pounds. But she had an iron will. To realize what my dad had to struggle with, with a background like that was kind of shattering...to appreciate the extent to which the racism gun can carry through. Still, people say, "You really think there's racism out there?" And I don't tell them my story, right? Sometimes people think you personalize something and it's like, you can't get over it, and that's not what I'm...

00:55:35 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** In terms of racial consciousness, what age do you feel like you've started to develop that? You said you saw your father facing things and your grandmother facing things.

00:55:42 **Roger Alvarado:** Y'know, believe it or not, it wasn't until maybe 10, 12 years ago. And the reason I say that is because it became evident to me, finally, when my dad tells me this story about...there's actually two native tribes in the Valley that his mom came from, and one of them was Indian, and the other was white. This is from a man who was maybe 86 at the time.

00:56:52 **Dr. Mark Allan Davis:** I had a student ask me that very question. I think he was just asking, because he wanted me to talk to the class, but he actually said, "Do you think that there's structural racism, institutional racism?" He's from Egypt. And I'm like, "You're in this class, aren't you?" But it just was really funny that he asked it. I wasn't quite sure why he asked it, but it ended up introducing a whole lecture that completely digressed from what I was doing. But at least he asked!

[...]

00:57:03 **Sydney Jackson:** I'm Sydney Jackson, I'm a senior, a history major, and a Africana Studies minor, working on this project. My first question is tied to when you were talking about your identity, your racial identity, you were talking about consciousness that was contributed by the Black consciousness. Did that affect you figuring out all those things...how did that affect your father at that age? Did that have any effect on him?

00:57:35 **Roger Alvarado:** No, it really didn't. He never addressed it. In fact, he was in El Salvador at the time. He had gone back, and during the strike, he wasn't around. He didn't return until a year or so afterwards. He came back talking about how the U.S. had to get out of El Salvador. That was kind of where he was at. He never got into his racial identity in that regard. Obviously, for me, he had to have struggled with it his whole life...or not that, but when he got here. When he was a youngster in El Salvador, he had gotten to the point where he had like two or three taxis, and this is when he was 16, 17 years old. Something had happened, and he had to leave, so he winds up coming to San Francisco, and he's probably 18, 19 years old at the time, so his exposure is from that point on, and that affected him.

00:58:54 **Sydney Jackson:** My other question was tied to your timeline. You said you started at San Francisco State in 1961. When did you graduate or did you graduate? You didn't graduate? You just kept working with them.

00:59:13 **Roger Alvarado:** I got readmitted to the school three times.

00:59:18 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** How many units are you off for graduation?

00:59:20 **Roger Alvarado:** I believe I had 140 units, but none of them are probably compiled to...

00:59:25 **Dr. Mark Allan Davis:** Any one major?

00:59:29 **Roger Alvarado:** I took every introductory course offered.

00:59:36 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** Would you like an honorary degree? ... We want to look into that, Roger. We're going to look into that because we really want you to get your degree.

00:59:46 **Roger Alvarado:** Actually, I think you're going to find out that I got most of my credits after the strike.

00:59:54 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** Now, did you do any jail time?

00:59:58 **Roger Alvarado:** The time I did was like, 21 days or something, maybe a month. I was unfortunately...eight other people were put on trial with me right before the mass bust, and we were convicted. Unfortunately, I think they were convicted along with me. And the judge says, "Alvarado is going to go in the holding cell" until my ruling, right? He had been the judge for the Auto Row arrests, in the early 60's Civil Rights protests, when the demonstrations were held on Van Ness Avenue to hire Black people in the auto sales industry. One of the defendants that was convicted skipped bail, so he said I was a flight risk, and he sent me to jail. They said they were going to hold me in city jail. I got there the next morning, and they shipped me down to county jail.

01:00:59 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** To San Bruno?

01:01:01 **Roger Alvarado:** Yeah. My lawyer finds out about it, so the day after that, I come back to the city jail, because you're not supposed to be in the county until they decide what they're going to do with you, anyway. That's what it was.

01:01:13 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** And you were there for 21 days...and who were the other eight that were kind of...

01:01:19 **Roger Alvarado:** Oh, they were participants, supporters of the strike, but nobody in terms of any of the organizations that were...not even SDS or PLP or any of the Socialist Workers Party or whatever.

01:01:35 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** How were those 21 days?

01:01:39 **Roger Alvarado:** It was amazing. It was really, really amazing. I wound up in there with Jesse...Jesse James, he was Reverend Jesse James, right? He had set up a teenage group called the Mission Rebels that was pretty active in the Mission area for about five to 10 years. I don't know what he was doing in jail, but his holding cell consisted of a large center room and four individual cells that held eight persons per unit, so you had 32 people who could be in this space. Every day was...something was happening, right? One instance, a young guy came in and tried to commit suicide by putting his head in a toilet. This friend of mine, I'm standing in that large room, and I hear this voice call out, "Hey Roger! Hey Roger!" I turn around and one of the psych professors, Jean...I can't remember Jean's last name. He said, "What are you doing here?" "What are you doing here?" "Well, I didn't pay my parking ticket." And he didn't have enough money when they busted him.

01:03:05 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** Really, the parking ticket? What?

01:03:06 **Roger Alvarado:** They brought him in for...who knows? The other thing is, I'm in there and there's a tall white guy who gets caught. This is night time. It's like 10 o'clock, something like that. They call his name out, and he comes out, and they tell him that his wife's dead. He and I had talked earlier, and he asked the guys to let me out, so we could spend some time together. It turns out he was married to an Indian woman, and they were dealing drugs. He was talking about some of his experiences with the police, and how, in one instance, they had all this money and drug paraphernalia out on the table, and they got busted. He said when he later appeared in court with the charges, there's no money, and there's just a couple of bags of whatever it is that they had, right? So he's really uncomfortable with what's happened – not only in terms of his wife, but there's no way of knowing where to go with how any of this is going to work out. We spent that night talking, and just going through his experiences and some of what he had gone through. Some guys would be able to get into the cell with drugs, and y'know, that went down, but there were three or four young guys in there who were pimps, and they got picked up for that. There was one older Black man there, and he had a way of saying everything he had to say in terms of trains...trains traveling, coming into the depot, whatever. There was one kid in there that was giving him a hard time one time, and he turned around, and his response was way over the kid's head, but he just nailed it. He was that familiar with relating to reality through this particular way of talking.

01:06:09 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** What would you say solidarity looks like to you? What does solidarity mean to you, and how do you get there?

01:06:16 **Roger Alvarado:** You can't say that it's just circumstance. There has to be some intent and a rationale. By intent, I would more accurately say, some analysis – some review of what's going on and what it is that you're looking at that appreciates and identifies the causes and effects...and doing it repeatedly with various resources, whether it's individuals or research or garnering information...and purpose. Also, being able to reevaluate and do it again as a continual part of realizing that it's actually a way of life that enables you to maintain what, to me, solidarity is. It takes more than an effort, and it's going to take a part of you with it, and you're going to travel down whatever road that leads you to.

01:08:23 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** I had one more question...I wanted to know – the strikes – what did your mother think of your involvement in all of this?

01:08:35 **Roger Alvarado:** My mom gets invited, during the strike, by a seventh grade teacher I had in Pacifica. I guess they go to dinner or something like that, and he's kind of talking to her what I'm doing – it's more or less inappropriate – he takes her out to his car when they're leaving and he opens the trunk, and he points to the bat, and he says, "Goodbye." She never criticized or was negative in regards to what I was doing. I think part of that was her own experience being married to my dad and what he had to deal with and where he was at. She

pretty much understood it. I actually have a couple of step-sisters who are graduates of San Francisco State who maintained that I “ruined” the school. It’s the kind of thing where people fall, and whether it’s by choice or by lack of experience or their experience.

01:10:11 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** So the seventh grade teacher had a bat in his trunk wanting to...

01:10:17 **Roger Alvarado:** Consequences. Implied consequences. Visual consequences.

01:10:21 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** About your involvement?

01:10:30 **Roger Alvarado:** Yeah.

[...]

01:10:55 **Roger Alvarado:** I had been connected to the Golden Diablos. They’re a small group of guys who were down around 16th and Cap St. One of them, Johnny Rodriguez, came up to the campus a couple of times. The sad reality was that I had gone down to the Mission District to talk to various people through Roberto Vargas. He was a Nicaraguan poet that was in the Mission District, and he set up this meeting – maybe five or six people in the room. They were each connected to various programs. This was during the federally funded “anti-poverty” programs. They were so non-committal. Roberto jumps up at one point and hollers out, “The fuck’s the matter with you guys?” That’s what I realized, that down the road this was their livelihood, this is how they were getting by, and for them to appear to be supportive was not going to be to their benefit. I had gone to the meeting in the Good Samaritan where we were talking about what we were doing here. A portion of the people that were there were upset that we were doing anything because we were disturbing things. Everybody was getting accustomed to being as they were. What we were doing was intrusive.

[...]

01:13:22 **Roger Alvarado:** I don’t think I realized what it was going to take in order to [become a leader]. I had become familiar enough with what I had done and the people that I had been around. I spent some time in various people’s homes, and I really had the opportunity to realize the struggle that so many people have. The opportunity to address some aspect of that was something that I was not gonna ignore. I think that’s part of the process. Some people come from political families, and they’re politicized. They seem to have a sense of what it takes to move along, which really does contribute to the analysis and the exposure, because you get some direction and you’re not just wandering around...talking about the, exposure, with Juan Preferria, You talked to him for half an hour, and you learned so much in regards to what’s happening in the world, and then translate it to here, and see the way in which it’s put together –

this whole process of colonizing...of going into places and reducing people's existence to certain areas. It's just such a consistent practice that sustains racism – the lack of objectivity, the use of any and all rationales to sustain. What's really interesting is talking to somebody that you are trying to tell what's going on – the denial. Denial is the first line of defense, you just deny whatever. Your knowledge, or participation, awareness...people jump on that right off the top. The other one is assurances. If you're given assurance with no names and no other resource in terms of recourse, then that's all you need to know: this is not working on your behalf. But you are learning...you're learning where people fall. Some people will go along to a certain point and then that's it. That's why, to me, it's important to understand people's capacities and that they're not all the same. The other thing is to encourage younger people, and to appreciate what younger people have done historically. It is really, really critical to appreciate the questions and the challenges for answers. If you need evidence, you go back to World War II, and they had 19 and 20 year olds flying planes. Women were flying planes from the United States to England during that time. If there's any hesitation in regards to having confidence in your ability to figure things out, don't be afraid to question it. At the same time, don't be afraid to accept it.

[...]

01:17:21 **Roger Alvarado:** The continual commitment [for the joy] of people...the fact that some folks kept coming back and back and back, realizing that people were putting their livelihoods on the line – that kind of thing. It wasn't until later that I realized, in talking with one young woman from Canada, her dad had been an associate professor in the creative arts department, and he had to go to Canada to find a job, and he wasn't the only one. The way the whole thing kept carrying on after the strike – Hayakawa getting rid of all the Black faculty. The retribution was just endless. I would encourage you to do another segment of this after the strike, because I don't know how well documented that is, but I think the existence of this school has to be recognized – needs to be recognized for what that group of people did at the time.

[...]

01:23:13 **Roger Alvarado:** [I had fond memories of] Juan. He was really an endearing person. Incredibly passionate.

01:23:21 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** And Juan has since passed, right?

01:23:23 **Roger Alvarado:** Oh, yeah. Actually, Juan was gay. He had some issues with some of the people in La Raza Studies because of that. He stuck it out – I believe he wound up graduating. I think he wound up working in San Francisco in some capacity. He wound up being stabbed in his home, I think it was Fremont.

01:23:55 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** How old was he at the time when that happened?

01:23:59 **Roger Alvarado:** Oh, 40s or 50s. Something like that.

01:24:08 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** What would you say is the impact of Juan?

01:24:16 **Roger Alvarado:** For me, it was just the exposure to so much information and his passion. His commitment to realizing change was pretty remarkable. He talked about demonstrations in Argentina, about how they would come after them with horses and sabers. What they would do is gather ball bearings and throw them out on the street, so that the horses wouldn't be able to step on them.

01:24:52 **Dr. Grace Yoo:** Was Juan president of LASA? What was Juan's role?

01:24:56 **Roger Alvarado:** He was a member. I didn't even know if we had officers – we were so small.

[...]